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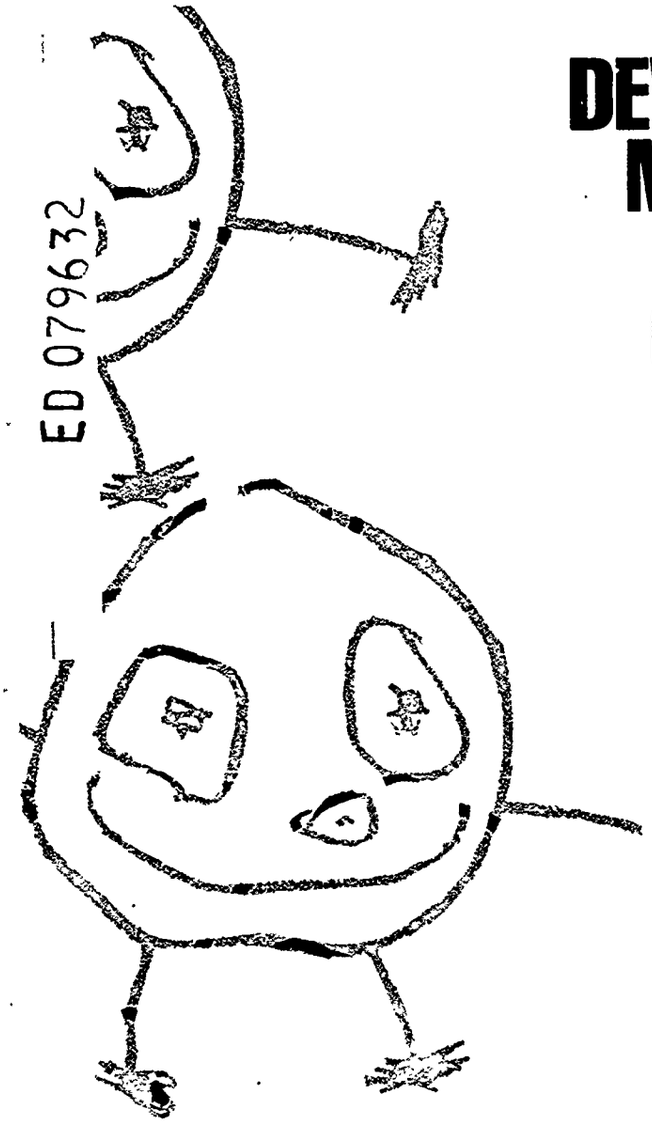
ABSTRACT

This document, written primarily for teachers of young school-age children, suggests sound, corrective approaches based on the type of observations and knowledge of the student's behavior available to every teacher. Implicit in the publication is the recognition that in the vast majority of children with delays or distortions in personality development, the manifestations are evident but not yet deeply embedded by the time they get to school. The author provides the reader with a picture of what the educator can contribute to the mental health of a child, concurring with the concept of the inseparability of all forces influencing the development of the child. This volume outlines, for the teachers, areas of involvement where they can be participants in providing a corrective emotional experience for children with mental health problems. Teachers can also enhance their teaching effectiveness by giving attention to the weaknesses in ego development which are apparent. Such help can then lead to improvement in learning as well as personality functioning. (Author/SES)



DEVELOPING MENTALLY HEALTHY CHILDREN

by
Katherine E. D'Evelyn

Introduction by
Reginald S. Lourie, M.D.

A STUDY/ACTION PUBLICATION FROM EKNE

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A STUDY/ACTION PUBLICATION
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The American Association of Elementary-Kindergarten-Nursery Educators, a national affiliate of the National Education Association, is a professional organization of educators specializing in the education of children from nursery through elementary school. Founded in 1884, its purpose is to unite elementary educators for the improvement and expansion of educational opportunities for all children in the United States. For membership information, write to E/K/N/E, NEA Center, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

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CREDITS

Cover Design and Illustration
Design: Robert J. McMeans, NEA Publications Division
Illustration: Greg Gilstrap (four years old)

Editorial Assistance
Virginia C. McCauley, E/K/N/E Staff

Photographs
p. 9, Photo Section, NEA Publications Division
p. 26, Teresa Conover, Santa Barbara, California, by courtesy of James W. Arnold, Director for Elementary Education, City Schools, Saratoga Springs, New York

Introduction

In this most pertinent and timely message to the teachers of young school-age children, Dr. D'Evelyn is pointing in the opposite direction from those educators who say that the schools are not concerned with the mental health of children. She is not speaking about the classroom teacher as a therapist for the mentally ill child. Implicit in this publication is the recognition that in the vast majority of children with delays or distortions in personality development, the manifestations are evident and are not deeply imbedded by the time they get to school. The sound, sensible, and corrective approaches she suggests are based on the type of observations and knowledge of the student's behavior that are available to every teacher.

The teacher need not feel helpless even if the people responsible for the child's earlier years have not done their job well. Unconcern often grows out of not knowing what to do, followed by unawareness.

The report of the Joint Commission on the Mental Health of Children, *Crisis in Child Mental Health: Challenge for the 1970's*, points out that it is impossible to separate the health problems of children from the mental health problems and both of these from their educational and environmental problems. This Congressionally authorized study, which involved over 500 of the country's authorities in all areas of childhood, further indicates that if we are ever to meet the problem posed by the more than 10,000,000 children and youth in the United States who have mental health difficulties, all of us who work with children must participate. Dr. D'Evelyn provides us with a picture of what the educator can contribute, implying her concurrence with the concept of the inseparability of all the forces influencing the development of the child.

The Joint Commission reports that 80 percent of the mental health problems of children are due to faulty training or experience and difficulties in adjustment that are close to the surface. In other words, for the vast

majority of the difficulties we see, one does not need highly trained mental health professionals to "treat" them. This volume outlines for the teachers of the young areas of involvement where they can be participants in providing a corrective emotional experience for at least a segment of this 80 percent of children in need. Teachers can also enhance their teaching effectiveness if attention is given to the weaknesses in ego development which are accessible. Such help can lead to improvement in learning as well as personality functioning.

Dr. D'Evelyn's "Musts for Mental Health and Ego Development" should be in the forefront of every teacher's awareness. Since they are inevitably intertwined with the learning process they hopefully will some day be part of a curriculum in personality development which will be required for all teachers.

The Joint Commission report states: "For the school to be a mentally healthy environment for growing children there must be a change in the concept of how this institution shall serve society through the children it educates. Its goals must be not only achievement but personality development, not only competence but ego strength, not only intellectual power but self-understanding and feelings of self-worth, not only adaptability but individuality, not only accommodation but initiative. The changes to be enacted involve all aspects of the school milieu—curriculum, teaching methods, teacher-child relations, administrative practices, and architectural design."

The human organism wants to be as normal as possible. If there have been poor answers in earlier phases of a child's life experience, there are later stages in which there can be reworking of these poor answers. The school age or "middle age child" offers a prime opportunity for remedial learning in his ego development as an important part of his curriculum.

Reginald S. Lourie, M.D.
Director, Department of Psychiatry,
Children's Hospital of the District of Columbia

President and Chairman
Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children

June 1970

Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children. *Crisis in Child Mental Health: Challenge for the 1970's.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970. p. 77

The Elementary School and Mental Health

"Johnny is such a source of confusion in the classroom. He is always interrupting. Some days I wish he weren't in my class."

"Sarah never gets her work done. I've just given up expecting anything of her."

"Bill can't work with others. He can't go along with another child's suggestion."

"Mary isn't learning to read. What can I do?"

In my years as a school psychologist, I have heard statements such as these quite often. Experienced as well as beginning teachers are puzzled many times by the behavior of the children with whom they work and need help in determining how to handle children who do not adjust well to their classrooms.

Too often the problem faced by the teacher is related to the way the child feels about himself as a person rather than his lack of ability to succeed or work with others. That's why it is essential that those of us who work with children understand the important role we must play in creating an atmosphere which promotes a positive self-image and good mental health.

This positive feeling about one's self which we refer to as "self-concept," "self-image," "self-regard," or "ego" is an important part of the child's development with which elementary schools must be concerned.

I believe that the school has a major responsibility for aiding ego development in the young child and that ego development and learning are closely related. Unless the child has a high self-regard, he is not motivated to learn. Unless he is successful in his school tasks, his ego or self-regard will suffer.

Recent studies of nursery school children, regardless of socio-economic or racial background, seem to indicate that the earlier a child has good experiences that lead to strong ego development the better it is for the child. Some of these studies give the pessimistic point of view, however, that kindergarten or elementary school is too late to try to help the child build a strong ego.

My point of view as an educator and psychologist is that we cannot, nor do we need to, take such a negative attitude toward helping children develop a positive self-image. While it is true that some children will inevitably fall by the wayside for a number of reasons, there are also many who will lead a happier, more successful life because of the experiences they have in an elementary school. Experiences with teachers and children outside of the family do have an impact on elementary children and may be the deciding factor in determining a child's future.

It is only as the young child gains the approval of his peers and the important adults in his life that his self-regard or ego grows and becomes strengthened. A child must win the approval of the adults and children with whom he lives, works, and plays. As the young child gains this approval, he begins to see himself as a capable person who can master his environment. Since he is successful, he can dream of success in the future and project or imagine what he would like to be when he grows up.

There are certain "musts" in a child's life if he is to have the strong ego that leads to sound mental health. These "musts" are true whether the child comes from an affluent suburb or an impoverished ghetto. These essential ingredients are:

1. Every child *must* know and feel he is an integral member of his class.
2. Every child *must* know what is expected of him as a class member.
3. Every child *must* become involved with his classmates.
4. Every child *must* begin to develop self-discipline.
5. Every child *must* achieve according to his ability.

The next five sections of this bulletin will discuss these essential ingredients of a good mental health program presenting specific case studies to illustrate ways in which teachers I have known have met the mental health needs of elementary school children. I have deliberately tried to give case studies of children where the outcomes have been successful. We know there are bound to be failures with children, but when this happens, the school specialists should be called upon for assistance.

This bulletin is not directed toward the seriously disturbed child needing very special help but toward the children, with mental health needs to which we must be more sensitive, found in most classrooms, nursery through elementary school. Thus, I hope that each reader will be able to apply to his own classroom the five "musts" of children's mental health discussed in this publication. The teacher may adapt his manner of working with his class so that what he does will be meaningful to his particular pupils, but the concepts remain the same.

The Child as an Integral Part of His Class

When speaking of the young child we often say, *"He feels at home in his class."* For the older elementary child we say, *"He feels he is an important member of his class."* These feelings are essential to learning and the development of a healthy self-concept. A classroom needs to be a closely knit unit with each pupil knowing he is seen as a "family member," with rights and responsibilities like all others in the class.

The teacher is the one who must take the lead in making known to all that *each child* has *his* place in the class. *"This is our class, yours and mine. All of us, with no exceptions. We work, learn, play, and live together."* Of course the teacher will say this only if he believes it, because the children will know if it is not true. They will know if the teacher wishes Bill or Susie were somewhere else.

It comforts and strengthens a child to know he is a fully accepted class member. It helps him feel free to learn because he does not need to be pondering the question, *"Do they really want me?"* One must be free to learn if a healthy self-concept is to develop.

A skillful teacher has little difficulty in making most children feel themselves an integral part of the class. But there may be a few children who find it difficult. These may be the sensitive child who has adopted an air of detachment from others as a defense against the hurts or demands of life at home or at school; the noisy bully who has adopted his blustering air as a defense against unrealistic demands, or against real or fancied rejections by adults and peers; and the occasional psychotic child who cannot control his feelings or behavior and thereby alienates himself from peers. These three kinds of children can be difficult to reach and to integrate into the class. But of course the teacher must try although he cannot always be successful.

Private, reassuring talks with the shy, detached child and the noisy, aggressive bully will be necessary. The goal of these conversations will be to attempt to establish a relationship that will make it seem safe and rewarding to be a fully participating class member and that will reveal the teacher to be an understanding and supportive adult.

The detached child will need much support from the teacher and the class. The aggressive bully will need both strong support and strong limits to work within, coupled with well-earned praise when he is successful in modifying his behavior.

The uncontrolled psychotic child will need specialized help from school and/or private therapists. He may need removal from the class until such time as he responds to treatment and can live in a normal group with benefit to himself, no longer a disturbing element.

For good classroom mental hygiene, we must accept the fact that there are some children who, at least for a time, cannot live in a regular classroom. Their behavior is too disturbing to permit the other pupils to live normally and they are not gaining anything from being in the class.

We teachers do not need to be concerned with diagnoses or labels. We must look at the behavior of a given pupil and his classroom functioning. When the teacher has made every effort to integrate the child, and the school specialists, the psychologist and the psychiatrist, find no way to help him modify his behavior, other plans need to be made for him. He may need to be in a special class for emotionally disturbed children, or he may need to be under home instruction until he has made enough response to therapy to return to school.

Case Study

Ellen, a second child with one older sister, was difficult to integrate into the third grade class. She demanded an excessive amount of the teacher's attention. Whenever the teacher gave a lesson assignment and then turned attention to a reading group, Ellen was never able to settle down and work like the others. She constantly came to the teacher to ask for further explanation of the lesson assignment or to ask if what she had done was right. This behavior caused considerable confusion, making it difficult for the teacher to work with a small group while the others worked on their assignment. The class became irritated at Ellen's unending interruptions and her place in the group was jeopardized.

The teacher set up an early conference with the mother to see if she could discover why Ellen seemed to require so much individual attention. The mother responded to the teacher's interest in Ellen and was led into a description of the child as she saw her in the home. She told the teacher that she was usually very irritated with Ellen, that Ellen seldom did things the way she wanted her to do them. She said she really couldn't like Ellen because she reminded her of her own older sister, of whom she had always been "jealous." Ellen was "just like this sister," while the older daughter

was very lovable and was her favorite.

The teacher, realizing she could not change the mother's feelings toward Ellen, was careful not to say anything that would give the mother an additional reason for being dissatisfied with the child. She said Ellen was an intelligent, very attractive little girl, and she was happy to have her in the class. These comments appeared to please the mother and may have given her a slightly different attitude toward Ellen.

What should the teacher do? How could she help Ellen feel more secure in class? Even though the root of Ellen's insecurity lay in the relationship with the parent, the teacher had to live with Ellen, and Ellen had a long school life ahead of her. What could be done to help her lead a happier school life and to promote ego growth?

The teacher decided to have a confidential talk with Ellen. She told her how much she liked having her in class and how well she did her work. She openly discussed the incessant interruptions and told Ellen she didn't need to worry that she would be forgotten. "I always know you are here," she told Ellen. "I don't forget you even when I am working with a group of other children. Let's make a plan that will be our secret. After I give the class an assignment, I will let you tell me just what it is so you will be sure. Then, when I get busy with a group and you may be afraid I have forgotten about you, hold up your hand. I will see you and will nod my head. You will know, then, that I have not forgotten you and you can finish your work."

Ellen was willing to try this plan and, because of her acceptance and her constant reassurance that the teacher had not forgotten her, it worked. Ellen became able to work longer and longer periods of time without needing the teacher's reassurance. She won the class approval for her independent action and grew in ego strength. The teacher did not learn what happened at home, but she had been successful in helping Ellen become a capable and accepted member of the class. Success and acceptance in one area saved her from complete ego destruction. School, which was a large part of Ellen's life, became more enjoyable for her and gave her much satisfaction. With growing self-confidence it is also possible that she was better able to cope with her family and to win her mother's approval for good school work.

The Expectations of Teachers

The teacher's expectations for each pupil and for the class as a whole are very important factors in the mental hygiene atmosphere and the consequent development of ego strength. One of the possibly valid criticisms of progressive or permissive education was that the classroom sometimes lacked constructive adult guidance or control. Children need this so long as it is not repressive or restrictive.

Children are more comfortable in a classroom where there are expectations for orderly group and individual behavior. Some of the unacceptable behavior seen by teachers is the result of the pupil's uncertainty about the teacher's expectations. Since the child is unsure, he pushes and tests to find the limits of acceptable behavior. This results in unconstructive or poor use of energy that could be directed toward wholesome activity and learning. It may result also in the child's interference with other pupils' learning and creative activity. Children do not learn in a chaotic setting and neither does such a situation provide a healthy mental hygiene atmosphere

A child's ego grows as he finds himself able to cope with problems and situations as he meets them. If he is overwhelmed because he lacks understanding of teacher and classroom expectations he becomes confused, or he may become indifferent as a defense, and ego strength remains stagnant or regresses.

One older elementary pupil with whom I once worked was in constant trouble in his classroom with his peers and his teacher. He caused them unhappiness and was miserable himself. He was not learning and felt he was unable to manage the whole situation. His teacher was kind but too permissive and indefinite in his expectations. The boy was finally moved to another class and his difficulties ceased. He enjoyed coming to school and completed lesson assignments on time.

After he had been in the new class for a month, I asked him how he explained his freedom from trouble and his satisfaction with school. He replied, *"She helps me be good."* This teacher's expectations were explicit; the pupil knew what to do, and as a member of a well-integrated class he began to be successful. The classroom atmosphere was not

restrictive, and a stimulating environment which helped the pupils to achieve success and to be creative in their individual projects was maintained. The teacher had respect for the pupils as individuals and for their individual capacities and interests. They, in turn, grew in self respect.

Group morale and good mental hygiene are present when clear, orderly, and reasonable expectations are understood. These expectations should grow out of respect for individual differences and should incorporate respect for pupils by the teacher and respect by pupils for the teacher and other class members.

While the elementary pupil can, and should, take part in discussions concerning expected classroom behavior, it is the teacher who retains the responsibility for structuring the classroom setting so the pupils will be helped to adhere to desirable patterns of behavior. This assumes that the teacher is a firm but kindly adult lending his ego strength to the pupils who are developing theirs. The teacher's expectations for behavior and learning will have a tremendous bearing on the classroom atmosphere and the success of the pupils.

Case Study

Tom was a fourth grade boy whose school work was poorly done. He had a health history of asthma attacks which probably contributed to the poor work. The parents babied him, excused him, and did not expect him to do any better. Tom, therefore, felt he could always be excused because of his health. By fourth grade, there were long periods of time between the asthma attacks, but Tom and his parents still attributed his poor school work to poor health.

The fourth grade teacher felt it was time for Tom to apply his intellectual ability and to stop using health as an excuse for poor work. She conferred with both parents and told them she thought it was wrong to go on making allowances for Tom's bad school work. Although he seemed to be satisfied with his lack of achievement, the teacher felt certain his self-regard was low. His passive manner and lack of involvement in class kept him from becoming an accepted class member. To be sure, there were secondary gains from the pampering by his parents, but Tom was now at the age where he should be gaining peer approval and acceptance.

The teacher and the principal had decided that Tom would be expected to turn in work just as the others did and that he would not pass unless he did. She would tell Tom of this decision and hold him to this expectation. The teacher further said that of course if Tom's physician felt Tom's health did not permit him to do his work, she

would have to alter her plan. Otherwise he would be treated as the other pupils were. The parents could accept the teacher's statements as to Tom's need to do better work but were not sure they could expect from Tom what was expected of the other pupils.

The physician saw no reason why Tom should not be expected to do his work and, although it was hard for the parents to alter their attitude toward Tom, they made efforts in this direction. The teacher made sure that Tom was rewarded with a "well-done" when he turned in neatly and accurately executed assignments on time. He began to have real satisfaction in his achievements, especially when he won the praise of the teacher, his classmates, and his parents.

Since the teacher was firm in her expectations, the parents and Tom had to face up to his working or not passing. This was not easy for either Tom or his parents, but his health did not suffer and he began to feel he, too, was a capable person. He derived more satisfaction from this than from the previous pampering.

Interaction and Involvement with Others

A child who is learning and building feelings of self-worth is one who is able to become involved with the on-going life of the classroom. To do this he must interact with the teacher and other pupils on a level where he tastes success and knows his contributions are valued and respected.

Pupils bring a wide range of skills and abilities to the class. Teachers must be aware of these individual differences, must respect them, and must lead each child along the path of greater learning and achievement.

This is not an easy thing to do, but it can be done and is being done by many sensitive teachers. It can be done by teachers who do not expect standardized results from the class as a whole and are receptive to each child's contribution or achievement when he has tried seriously to do a good job.

In any class will be found some children who interact with all classroom situations. A few of them may be so attuned to everything said or done in the classroom that they are constantly making themselves heard and receive a disproportionate amount of attention. With these children, the question is how they can be guided toward quieter participation and more independent work. The guidance of such a child requires a tactful approach by a teacher who is aware of his need for response from others. The teacher can see that he gets the needed response without monopolizing too much of the classroom time.

The quieter child may be involved in what is going on but may accomplish tasks with little outward noise or vocalization. A child who seems too quiet or shy, even though he is learning and taking part in on-going projects, undoubtedly would like to feel freer to express his thoughts. If he does not feel free to do so, he probably does not think what he has to say is worthy or will be well received by others. This indicates the possibility of poor ego development. Teachers would do well to try to draw out such a child without making him feel too conspicuous.

Some children will not become as involved as others which may be due to a difference in interests. Unless a child becomes involved with most, if not all, classroom tasks he will not learn and for him this is a mental health hazard. It is the rare child who does not feel satisfaction from acquiring academic skills and gaining in ability and competence to master many life situations. Part of good mental health is success in managing life's tasks at different stages of development. It can be devastating and ego deflating to a child to see his peers achieving mastery and not be able to do so himself.

Schools should be very careful to see that the young child gains a sense of mastery and not failure. The young child who is having trouble with learning to read should receive careful observation to determine what individual attention he needs in order to learn. He should not be set apart as "not ready," or be made to repeat the grade and his failure (usually) while his peers advance to the next grade.

The child who does not taste success does not become involved in the classroom and the best way to help him to begin to interact with others is to help him become successful. To be completely realistic, this goal is not always possible. But the school should have the necessary psychological staff to do an individual study to determine how to help a specific child. This help may be all the way from a different approach to teaching him reading, to psychological therapy. The psychologist can discuss this need for therapy with the parent

Reading is used here as an example because it is so important to a child. Success in school depends on the ability to read and it is usually the first skill stressed in grade one. It is the first bit of formal learning that leads to a feeling of success or failure.

Interaction in the classroom is not solely on a formal academic level. The pupil interacts with other school personnel than his teacher, including the school nurse, the principal, special teachers, custodians, and cafeteria workers. How he will interact or relate to them depends somewhat on his former experiences with adults, and a great deal on how they relate to him. All staff personnel in the elementary school should be employed partly on the basis of their ability to relate to young children in a helpful way.

The total school atmosphere affects the young child and he still needs the adult's support and acceptance in a way the older child does not. The young child is still quite vulnerable to the reactions of the adults in his school world. The adults make the atmosphere either conducive or unconducive to ego growth.

Case Study

Mary came to third grade a shy child who sat passively in class, turned in her work, and remained quiet. She seldom talked, and when she did it was in such a low, hesitant voice it was difficult to hear her. The teacher realized Mary must have been ridiculed by others, perhaps at home and at school. She guessed Mary felt she could contribute nothing of value and, rather than being laughed at, she preferred to remain silent.

In a conference the teacher told the mother she was concerned over Mary's lack of class involvement and of communication. The mother said, "Yes, Mary is shy. If there is anything you can do to help her overcome this trait, I shall be most grateful." The teacher said she planned to try and felt she needed to make Mary know she was a welcome member of the class with ideas that were valued. The mother thought this was a good idea and said she would see what she could do at home such as stopping the older sister from teasing and laughing at Mary.

Because the teacher was adept at making every pupil feel he was a wanted member she was able to make Mary feel wanted, also. She unobstrusively gave Mary extra attention in the beginning and began asking her for ideas on special class projects when she was sure Mary could give some good ones. After Mary got over her surprise at this attention, she began to open up and talk to the teacher and the children. She volunteered to work on certain projects with non-aggressive children. As the year went on she became really involved in her classroom and was a communicating, contributing member. Her self-concept grew more positive as she gained the respect of her classmates.

Developing Self-Discipline

No one can have sound mental health who does not have self-discipline. Self-discipline and self-control, which go hand in hand, include such ingredients as tolerance of frustration, patience, and persistence at a required task. They mean the ability to forego immediate reward for a longer term goal and the ability to control impulsive behavior that is upsetting to others and to one's self. A six-year-old will show some self-discipline but a sixth grade child will, or should, show much more. The six-year-old may show the beginnings of many of the qualities mentioned above, and the sixth grade pupil should exhibit a considerable degree of these qualities.

If we can agree that such qualities are important to a pupil's mental health, the question arises as to what teachers can do to develop or foster them. Since the child learns from all adults, those at home as well as those at school, the school may have a difficult time doing its part if the home fails to do its share. Children copy behavioral patterns and emulate the loved and respected adults in their total environment. Children vary in temperament and sensitivity and we know that innate characteristics have great influence in determining their reactions and responses. We also know that environmental factors are important. Usually, if a child sees lack of self-discipline and self-control at home, the patterns introduced at school are less effective than when the home and the school reinforce each other.

How then does a teacher go about developing a child's self-discipline? Certainly not by punishment and harsh restrictions. Punishment is often linked with discipline, and at times punishment may be essential in maintaining group control, but punishment and self-discipline must not be considered correlates.

Many of the things we have talked about in preceding chapters go into building self-control, and I think we will see that self-discipline does not mean harmful repression of legitimate feelings of anger and rejection. The elementary school child can often be led into self-control by the teacher's setting of definite limits of behavior and action, by encouragement and expressions of understanding, by praise of recognizable improvement as he works toward achievable goals. Additional factors are teacher expectations and examples. In other words, the child who lives

in a school environment where the adults expect self-control and set examples by their behavior, will have a greater chance of building self-discipline than he otherwise might have.

If we stop here, however, we leave out a most important point. We must add the necessity for the child to feel stimulated by interesting experiences and to be constructively occupied with satisfying activities. He must have an expanding environment and a feeling of being able to master this environment.

The teacher who can establish the suggested kind of classroom atmosphere must himself be a disciplined person, but not heavy handed or heavy hearted. Life should not be a grim experience for little children if we can possibly prevent it. Children need the light touch and the injection of humor into their lives. Humor and the spirit of fun do not run contrary to the building of self-control. In fact, these attributes foster it because the child who can feel happy and satisfied with his environment will be able to develop self-discipline more easily than the one who is unhappy and dissatisfied. True, an unhappy child may become quiet and withdrawn in the classroom, but this is not self-control; this is depression, and the child is having no practice in building self-discipline because he is not reacting to, or becoming involved with, his environment.

Are we saying that teachers are expected to be models of behavior for their children? Teachers, like parents, *are* models or examples whether they like it or not.

What is the relationship of lack of self-control or self-discipline to mental health? The lack of these qualities causes a child to be disorganized, often irritated, impatient, or occasionally wildly exuberant. It is very easy to see that an individual who responds in these ways has a difficult, if not impossible, task of coping with everyday tasks and thus develops a poor self-image and a defective ego. He hinders his own development and often interferes with others by his erratic behavior and excessive need for teacher control and assistance. His mental health suffers, his learning suffers, and his relationship to peers is at a standstill or may even deteriorate. As his peers move ahead of him in self-control, they see him as a baby or a nuisance. There is plenty of reason to be concerned about such a child if the impulsive, or irritable, behavior continues.

Case Study

Peter was a bright five-year-old who came to kindergarten with the pattern of resisting routine and arguing with adults. No limits had ever been set up for his behavior and as a consequence he was very confused. He did not know what the teacher expected of him, or whether he could count on her for guidance and control. Never

having received this at home he could not anticipate such control at school. Here, he was confronted with a completely new situation and he did not know how to cope with it.

His anxious, resistant behavior let the experienced teacher know that he was looking for help. She told him in a confidential talk that she was the boss in the classroom and the children would know what to do because she would show them or tell them. His anxiety was immediately lessened and the teacher heard him say soon after this to another child, "You're not the boss here; Miss S. is the boss."

Knowing the teacher would guide him if necessary, Peter relaxed, began to enjoy kindergarten, and let his intelligence shine through. He was a creative child, and when he felt secure in the knowledge that his teacher would let him know how far he should go and would help him maintain control; his hyperactive, irritable behavior disappeared. Gradually his self-discipline increased because he knew how to handle himself in the kindergarten situation.

The teacher did not curb his creative, imaginative activity, but she did help him grow in self-discipline so that he could play without disturbance to others. He became a much happier child when he learned the boundaries and felt capable of mastering this new experience.

The Importance of Achievement

One of the most difficult tasks for any school system is to enable each pupil to feel a sense of achievement. Schools receive pupils of all levels of ability, interest. and motivation. It taxes the teacher's ingenuity to provide learning situations for each that will build a feeling of real accomplishment.

A feeling of accomplishment is essential, however, not only for the pupil's progress but also for his mental health. Nothing dulls motivation more quickly than constant failure. Repeated failure and lack of motivation tear down the feelings of self-worth. When a pupil reaches the point of hopelessness, no learning takes place and ego growth is stunted.

Perhaps it is unrealistic for schools to expect to help all pupils be successful, but it must be attempted, and schools try in many ways to achieve this goal. It is only when schools and children accept individual differences, capacities, and interests as inevitable and quite all right that this can be accomplished. No matter what teaching methods or materials are used, there will be a wide range of achievement because of the factors mentioned above. Schools cannot afford to be too rigid in their demands or expectations or pupils will be hurt.

Since schools reflect the parents of the community, it is necessary for the parents to understand these things we are talking about, too. There is a happy medium somewhere in the expectations of parents and teachers when children are encouraged to use all their ability but are not pressured or discouraged by excessive demands. Somewhere in this happy medium lies growth in ego strength and good mental hygiene. Children do learn more when adults expect them to learn. The secret lies, however, in accepting all visible measures of learning and in encouraging the pupil to take the next step.

Our society demands that children attend school for a prescribed number of years, and since this is so, society must provide the kind of curriculum that helps children learn the things they are capable of learning and which promotes a positive self-image through achievement.

Some may raise the question: *"Is it enough for the school to be concerned with the child's achievement? The school is not the child's whole life."* No, the school is not the child's whole life, but it is a very important part of it—so important that failure in this area can cause serious emotional problems for the child. Certainly the child's parents and their acceptance of his school performance influence the child's attitude toward himself, but the school can work to modify the parents' attitudes through conferences with the teacher, principal, and the school psychologist. But this change of attitude is not always accomplished, and the child needs even more the psychological lift that school can provide.

Although a feeling of achievement is an essential factor in developing a strong self-image, failure can also contribute to ego strength since it requires a realistic appraisal of achievements and abilities. It also involves the feeling of being able to master a task after one has failed. When failure means nothing but a disastrous experience to a small child and a hopeless deflating of ego, it can be extremely harmful.

Since no one can succeed in all undertakings, learning how to cope with and overcome failure becomes an important early lesson. When children learn how to handle failure constructively they will grow in ego strength. This is very different from saying that young children must have the lesson of failure since this is life. The truth is that they are bound to meet with failure at times, and they often need help from adults to move away from failure to success or to a modification of their expectations, without being traumatized. A young child, left with failure and without the knowledge of how to proceed, may develop feelings of discouragement and futility that cast a pall over his long years of schooling that lie ahead.

Case Study

John, a third grade boy who was discovered to be very bright through a group intelligence test, was not reading as well as the average third grader, and he seemed to dislike school. The teacher had told the mother about John's reading. From then on the mother nagged the boy to read more at home and pushed him to the point of passive resistance. His reading became worse and he often refused to read in the classroom.

The teacher suggested to the parent that consultation with the school psychologist might be helpful. Interviews and tests showed that John was intelligent, had good work attack, and had strong likes and dislikes in his reading choices. True, he was lagging behind what is considered average third grade reading, but not seriously so unless one compared his third grade reading score with his intelli-

gence quotient.

The psychologist did not recommend tutoring (the mother's desire) or even extra reading assignments. She did suggest to the teacher that the boy be permitted to make his own reading choices and that most of his reading be done silently. The mother was asked to stop questioning John about his reading and to stop urging him to read a certain amount each day. This was important because John's assumed lack of interest in reading had been caused by his anger at his mother's continual nagging. The mother was able to stop all talk about reading and even to make no comment when she saw John beginning to read on his own.

Gradually John read more at school and at home as teacher and parent followed the suggestions given by the school psychologist. One day near the end of the school year, the mother came by the psychologist's office to report triumphantly, "John reads a great deal at home now and I never say anything to him even when he puts his feet on the sofa slip-cover when lying down to read."

John's reading improved steadily and by the following year was above the so-called grade norm. Only by gaining the parent's understanding and by her ability to change her attitude toward John's reading was the school able to help him improve his reading and his mental health. He no longer "hated" reading and, consequently, no longer "hated" school. He had taken his place in what for him was his present life work and was accepted by the others in his class.

The School as a Positive Force

The main goal of the school is usually stated to be the teaching of those skills and abilities that will enable an individual to live in society and to be able to cope with life's demands. The school can also be a positive force in the mental health of children.

In the preceding sections of this bulletin, it has been made unquestionably clear how very dependent the elementary child is on the teacher for security, learning, and ego growth. In the elementary school the teacher-pupil relationship should be a close one. The young child needs a strong person as a guide, one who is controlled and disciplined, but also warm and supportive. Since the young child's ego is still developing, he needs a sensitive authority figure to imitate.

Young children need to be in a situation where they sense that things will go well. They need to be free to pursue their tasks knowing they can go to the teacher for needed assistance and that the world around them will go smoothly.

The teacher is not a pal who meets the children on their level. He is the teacher, the leader, the voice of authority, the strong one. Although not a pal, he is a person who can be counted on and trusted. The child must know that the teacher is always "on his side," to help him through difficult lessons and through difficult social situations. The teacher will not always "take his side" by approving everything he does, but he will be understanding. He will help him or point the way to managing a situation. The teacher will not be perfect because that is impossible and undesirable. It is good for children to see that adults, too, show emotion. They do not feel too guilty then when they feel angry or jealous. If a teacher sometimes shows just anger, and is not violent in his reactions, it is normal behavior and useful for the children to observe.

Although the importance of the preschool years in relation to a child's mental health and ego development cannot be minimized, we still must not overlook the impact of the child's experience in the elementary school. All of us who have worked with elementary pupils know that they continue to grow and change for the better when they have "good" school experiences.

The five "musts" of mental health discussed in this publication can be stated and written down much easier than they can be supplied to each child with whom we work. It is not possible to provide every child at all times and in the same degree with this stated list of ingredients for sound mental health. But we must try. Each teacher must go about the business in his own way, and if he believes these essential elements are important for all children, he will be helping children to face life with confidence and courage.

Resources for Further Study

Books

Allen, Roach Van. *Attitudes and the Art of Teaching Reading.* Washington, D.C.: American Association of Elementary-Kindergarten-Nursery Educators, NEA, 1965.

Almy, Millie. *Ways of Studying Children.* New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1969.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA. *Learning and Mental Health in the School,* Yearbook 1966. Washington, D.C.: the Association, 1966.

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Bloom, Benjamin S. *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964.

Bruner, Jerome S. *Toward a Theory of Instruction.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966.

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English, Horace B., and Ava C. English. *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychological and Psychoanalytical Terms: A Guide to Usage.* New York: David McKay Co., 1958.

Gordon, Ira J. *Studying the Child in School.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966.

Hartup, Willard W., and Nancy L. Smothergill, editors. *The Young Child, Reviews of Research.* Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1967.

Jenkins, Gladys G., Helen S. Schacter, and William W. Bauer. *These Are Your Children.* Third edition. Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1966.

Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children. *Crisis in Child Mental Health: Challenge for the 1970's.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970.

LaBenne, Wallace D., and Bert I. Greene. *Educational Implications of Self-Concept Theory*. Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Goodyear Publishing Co., 1969.

Rosenthal, Robert, and Lenore Jacobson. *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectation and Pupils' Intellectual Development*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968.

Roswell, Florence, and Gladys Natchez. *Reading Disability: Diagnosis and Treatment*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1964.

Smart, Mollie S., and Russell C. Smart. *Children: Development and Relationships*. New York: Crowell Collier and Macmillan, 1967.

Stendler, Celia B., editor. *Readings in Child Behavior and Development*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964.

Wattenberg, William W., and Clare Clifford. *Relationship of the Self-Concept to Beginning Achievement in Reading*. USOE, DHEW, Cooperative Research Project #377. Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University, 1962.

Films

A Mask for Me, A Mask for You. 16 min., 16 mm., sound, color. $180 purchase. Universal Education and Visual Arts, 221 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003. (1969).

A "rejected" child discovers identity and satisfaction through creative expression and role playing. Particularly emphasizes feeling of enjoyment and sense of fulfillment child can experience through successful involvement in art media, regardless of level of learning and accomplishment.

And Gladly Learn. Two parts. 37 min., 16 mm., sound, b & w. Audio Visual Aids Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84321. (1967).

Part I shows development of self concept in nursery school setting. Part II shows language growth and development and concept formation in children through nursery school activities. Produced by Department of Family and Child Development of Utah State University.

If These Were Your Children. Two reels. 28 min. and 21 min., 16 mm., sound, b & w. Free loan. Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010. (1962).

To help those concerned with children understand basic principles of good mental health, recognize early signs of emotional difficulties, and find ways of meeting the emotional needs of children.

Introduction to the New Nursery School. 25 min., 16 mm., sound, color. $220 purchase. New Nursery School Films, 1423 Eleventh Street, Greeley, Colorado 80631.

Depicts experimental work at New Nursery School, Greeley, Colorado, showing how school develops child's positive self image, increases his sensory and perceptual acuity, improves his language skills, and develops his cognitive abilities.

Room To Learn. 22 min., 16 mm., sound, color. Free loan, $125 purchase. Association Films, Inc., 600 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022. (1969).

Presents Early Learning Cer..er in Stamford, Connecticut, an open-plan early childhood school with facilities and program reflecting current educational thinking.

About the Author

KATHERINE E. D'EVELYN, psychologist, teacher, lecturer, and author, was chief psychologist for the Department of Psychological Services of the Great Neck (New York) Public Schools for nineteen years. Although officially retired, she continues to write and to do volunteer counseling for the Nassau County (New York) Mental Health Association.

Dr. D'Evelyn has written numerous articles for professional journals and is the author of *Individual Parent-Teacher Conferences* (published by Teachers College Press, Columbia University), *Meeting Children's Emotional Needs* (published by Prentice-Hall), and *Reporting to Parents* (published by E/K/N/E).

A graduate of Pestalozzi Froebel Teachers College, the author also holds three degrees from Teachers College, Columbia University (B.S. in Early Childhood Education and M.A. and Ed.D in Psychology).

Dr. D'Evelyn is a Fellow in the American Psychological Association and has served as president of Division 16 (School Psychologists). Long active in educational and psychological organizations, she has been president of the Nassau County Mental Health Association and was for a number of years a member of the Community Mental Health Board of Nassau County. The honors received by Dr. D'Evelyn include being named Woman of the Year in Education, a citation from the Nassau County Mental Health Association, and the Dorothy N. Hughes Award from New York University.

Other Publications from E/K/N/E

Our Newest: **Independent Learning . . . in the Elementary School Classroom.** Lois E. Williams. 1969 48 pp. $1.25. (281-08610)

Anger in Children. George Sheviakov. Examines causes, characteristics and classroom considerations related to children's anger 1969. 32 pp 75c (281-08752)

Attitudes and the Art of Teaching Reading. Roach Van Allen. Stresses need to work for love of reading as well as mastering skills 1965. 48 pp. $1. (281-08792)

Blockbuilding. Esther B. Starks How this activity contributes to the child's development. Rev. 1965. 32 pp. 75c. (281-08632)

Diagnostic Teaching. Dorris M. Lee. Supports an individualized, child-centered view of teaching Rev 1970. 52 pp. $1.25. (281-08808)

Evaluation of Teaching. Gertrude M. Lewis. 1966. 96 pp $1.50. (281-08740)

Family Life and Sex Education in the Elementary School. Helen Manley. 1968. 26 pp. $1. (281-08852)

Fostering Maximum Growth in Children. Eli M. Bower. Examines concepts of learning, significance of play, and beneficial uses of stress. 1965. 40 pp. 65c. (281-08612)

Guiding Children Through the Social Studies. Robert W. Reynolds and others. 1964. 40 pp $1. (281-08664)

Humanizing the Education of Children. Earl C. Kelley. Discusses helping boys and girls to realize their humanity. 1969. 21 pp. 75c. (281-08872)

Kindergarten Education. A clarification of what constitutes a "meaningful experience" in kindergarten. 1968. 72 pp. $2. (281-08844)

Discounts: 2-9 copies, 10 percent; 10 or more copies, 20 percent. All orders must be prepaid except those on official purchase order forms. Shipping and handling charges will be added to billed orders.

Language and Literature: The Human Connection. Bill Martin, Jr. Relates the drama of an elementary teacher faced with a highly verbal child in her classroom. 1967. 48 pp. $1 50. (281-08818)

Movement Education for Children: A New Direction in Elementary School Physical Education. Lorena Porter. Examines recent trends in elementary physical education curriculum development and in-depth movement experiences. 1969 32 pp. $1 00 (281-08874)

Multi-Age Grouping: Enriching the Learning Environment. J. P. Causey and others 1967. 40 pp. $1 (281-08820)

Prevention of Failure. Sybil Richardson and others Based on the premise that failures and dropouts can be identified and prevented early in school life. 1965. 80 pp. $1 (281-08788)

The Step Beyond: Creativity. William Burton and Helen Heffernan. Experiences of teachers who have experimented with the creative approach. 1964. 40 pp. $1. (281-08668)

Thinking . . . Feeling . . . Experiencing. Margaret S. Woods. Suggests ways of working creatively with children to achieve true learning. 1962. 36 pp. 75c (281-08748)

Values in Early Childhood Education. Evangeline Burgess. Summarizes research, with emphasis on nursery school education. 1965. 96 pp. $1.50. (281-08636)

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